

fantasy macabre 1

60p


\$2



tanith lee colin wilson




Leopard eyes



but for all that
a curious slide into some forgotten shell
a slip behind the corner
a fade between the shadows
but for that
a nervous pounce around a darkened room
a gaze between the edges
a glimpse between the silences
but for all that
and that
we snatch some fragments of a crumbling tomb
tear down far curtains of neglect
and stumble over seasons of decay
~~but for all that~~
we do not survive too long this night
but rather turn our leopard eyes
upon the velvet ceilings
and beware the claws
that unsheathe slowly and scar
our liquid faces
to mingle blood and tears
on a morning of neglect
upon the sands of our misgivings

poem: dave reeder

art: allen koszowski



fantasy macabre

number 1

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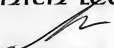
This first issue of FANTASY MACABRE is dedicated with respect and thanks to FRANK BELKNAP LONG and LEE BROWN COYE - masters of word and line.

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goldenhair

tanith lee



Art: Alan Hunter

Twice he asked her, and twice she refused him. The third time he did not ask.

She had no right, in any event, to deny him. She lived on his land, drew her sustenance from his fields, her drink from his river and his well. Even her house was built of the wood of his trees. She was his property. And she had said no.

It was her hair that first made him notice her. She was working in the wheat fields with the others, scything beneath the late summer sun. Her hair was not the colour of the wheat. It was the colour of new-minted metal, coiled round and round her head and still falling from the coils to her waist. It was massy hair, but fine, gold in the shadow, silver under the sun.

It was four years since he had ridden so far on his estate to view the harvesting. He had not beheld much of interest; now he found this. He stopped his horse to look. She had a supple, well-made body under her serf's kirtle. He wondered if her face would spoil the rest. But when she turned, he perceived it did not.

He called the overseer.

"That girl, my lord? That's Clessy."

When the overseer had fetched her, she stood quietly by the horse, looking up at the lord of the estate, unblinking.

"I've travelled to many regions," he said, "but I never saw a piece like you before." And when she made no answer, and did not lower her eyes, thinking her bold, he said: "My bed's the place for you. What do you say?"

She paled then, and her eyes widened. And in a voice like winter ice, she told him: "I say no, my lord."

The blood burned his face. He thought the overseer had heard her.

"I might have you whipped for that," he said, but she only went on staring at him, and he spurred his horse and rode off in a rage. And on the way, he killed one of the serf children, riding it down in his anger, purposely, and breaking its neck.

That dusk he hunted the forest aisles by torchlight. A great stag loomed up from the glades. His stag, destined for his knife. And when it had been cut down at the end of the long chase, he sheared free the dripping antlers, like branches of the forest itself, and the blood and wine quickened him. Presently, he inquired after the house of Clessy. Everyone knew



her, by that hair of hers; she was easy to discover. Easier than the stag had been.

He went alone to her door and smote on it. He called in a false voice, not his own, asking her help, for he had been informed that Clessy was a healer. When she opened the door, a cloak wrapped around her and her hair like a golden cloud on the dark air of night, he laughed. "It is I, witch," he said, "so let me in."

"I will not," she said, but now she spoke lazily. And then behind her he made out the dim shape of a powerful man - kin, lover or husband. "You had better go, my lord," she said. "I'm not for you."

And something unnerved him, not just the hulking youth at her back, but some essence in her pale smooth countenance.

Again he turned and came away. On this occasion, it was a girl he murdered, a dun-haired girl provided for his bed, who displeased him. He flung her from a window. She was his and the window was his, and the courtyard below on which she was broken, that was his too.

He lay in bed and brooded till the sun rose and touched the crown of the sky. When the sun began to descend, he sent twenty men to fetch Clessy Goldenhair from her house. "Slay any man you find with her, and burn the hovel, and her garden patch. And if she keeps any live-stock, slaughter that too."

When she arrived, he had them chain her to the wall.

"Now we shall see," he said. And she spat in his face.

When he had finished with her, he ordered in his men. Some were strangely reluctant, but most were glad and ready. There were enough to kill her. She died in silence, her eyes wide open. He remembered the scythed wheat and the stag, and just before they dragged her body away, he slashed from her head her golden hair, and binding it firmly at one end with a cord, he kept it by him, stroking it and playing with it.

Next day, he rode homeward to the manor-fort, and the hair was tied on the pommel of the horse.

In the fields, his serfs watched him go by. They watched the gold cascade spilling over the withers of the horse. No one spoke of it.

That evening too, he toyed with the golden hair, but it irked him, even now. He wished it were all to do again, her death. It had not sufficed. At last he tossed the hair on the rushes of the floor, and went to his bed.

In the dead of night, in the blackness of it, something like blown autumn leaves or like wheat sheaves in the wind, rustled outside his door. In the morning, there was only a faint track there in the light dust of the house. As if a broom had swept across the threshold of the chamber.

Today, he chose to go riding again. As he was waiting for the horse in the courtyard, he heard the sound of blown leaves along the ground behind him. He glanced about, but there was nothing there. The horse was brought and he mounted it. He galloped through the gate, along the road above the orchards. Sometimes he heard the sound again, and when he looked, the grasses were moving at the roadside as if a fox ran through them.

He reached the priest's dwelling, and reined in. The priest emerged, bowing, agitated. The priest feared the lord of the estate more than any god, and showed his fear extravagantly, placatingly.

"Do you see the grasses move?" the lord asked the priest, and, gazing fearfully about, the priest nodded, not having seen at all.

"Perhaps one of your hounds is following you, my lord."

Somehow the priest could not keep his gaze steady. It wandered to a hastily dug grave that last night he had been persuaded into praying over.

The lord cantered back towards the manor-fort, and the movement in the grass returned with him. In the bright sunlight, he caught a gleam like metal.

He entered the hall of the manor-fort, and sitting at table, the joints and wine before him, felt a sinous thing wind strand over strand around his ankle.

Wildly he pushed upwards from his chair, sending the trenchers flying. But, in that second, the wound prescence slipped from him, and was gone. He apprehended only a dazzle of yellow wriggling into a crevice.

"Did you spy that great tawny rat?" he shouted. "Put out poison. I will not have vermin in my hall."

Later, he was playing chess with his trembling steward, who, terrified to win, gnawed his fingers. The amber and ivory counters clicked on the board. A pawn dropped from the lord's grasp. Heavily, a switch beat against his knee, as if a dog fawned on him. He brushed at his knee, and encountered silken rope, which sprang away, doubtless alive, but no dog to spring with it.

He was in time to glimpse a golden thing that shone and coiled and slid from sight into the shadows.

That night he kept from his bed until the candles were burned to stubs and the stubs themselves melted away. He went up sluggishly, and something moved after him, like a little dog that loved him, creeping always close.

True, he tried to shut the door on it, but he was not quick enough by half. It came in with him, and curling about his ankle, it twisted itself like a snake, lifting upward to his knee, his thigh, about his waist, his chest, to his throat. And at his throat, it tightened and he could not hold it from him, it was so fine, so slippery, and yet, across his neck, like a band of iron. All was

done slowly, a fragment of air squeezed from him instant by instant. And though he roared out at the beginning, no one ran to him. But soon he could not roar. And as he choked, by infinitesimal inches, to his death, his hands still plucked at Clessey's golden hair - the first of her he saw. The last he saw of anything. Until:

"That is the substance of my refusal," she said softly to him, yet looking unblinking in his face from where she stood among the wheat.

At that, he shook himself, and noted everything was as it had been. The late summer sun, the workers with their scythes, the overseer pausing nearby. And he himself, the lord, on his horse. And he had just said to her: "My bed's the place for you. What do you say?"

"Yes," she said now. "It is all a dream you have had. But it shall be real if you kill and hunt and come to me again, at my house tonight, and call me witch and demand to enter. Real as you dreamed it, and to spare."

The blood burned his face. He thought the overseer had heard her.

"I might have you whipped for that," he said.

But he spurred the horse away across the field.

And seeing the serf child in his path, he dragged the horse aside, in order to avoid it.



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CORRUPTION

DAVID SUTTON

Art: Russ Nicholson.

William Dillington had always hated spiders, in fact all creeping things.

Friday was no exception. He watched with a kind of repulsive attraction as the water swirled sluggishly around the glistening white enamel of the bath and a spider, caught unawares, was carried swiftly to its fate in a gurgle of darkness. It struggled momentarily, legs moving in a rapid, panicky arc, and was gone. William knew it was only a vestige of childish fear that tormented him; forty years old and afraid of spiders! However, since he lived alone and was unmarried, a few eccentricities hardly mattered.

Such as his mania for tidiness. He detested, almost as vigorously as insects, nasty, smelly ashtrays. He took an insatiable delight in general cleanliness, which meant that William kept his house spotless. Dirt was a veritable mine of gold if ever found, so rare a sight would it have been to visitors.

Now, though, a nice hot bath. The offending spider had disappeared, but to make absolutely sure, William sponged down the bath with disinfectant. Filled with hot, steamy water he stepped into the tub, intent on at least a good hour relaxing and cleansing himself. William's plump body and white, almost hairless legs, reddened with the heat as he rubbed them down in a surfeit of bubbly soap.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness," William said to himself. That was one of his favourite sayings, which of course no one ever heard because he was almost always alone. The lonely life did not upset him though, in fact he preferred it. People in general frightened him and he always felt very self-conscious in company, especially mixed company. He knew very well he had a small mental problem and understood it, but he felt that the necessary adjustment just not worth the effort. Ever since his father had passed on - when William was very young - his mother had mollycoddled him, cherished and over-nursed him, until he became quite stilted in the company of other people. Now, at his age, he could hardly start changing his ways and after all, his present situation presented very few difficulties. With people about, problems inevitably arose and therefore William's expedient choice was the life of seclusion, books taking the place of people. Books seldom upset him, they were impartial and the only time he felt the slightest twinge of fear was whenever he read one of those psychological stories. William found it too easy to read himself into the characters, which would frighten him and he did not like to think about such things.

Although William's life went smoothly enough, there was one particular aspect of it that annoyed him intently. His elder sister, Ivy, occasionally visited him and this usually meant a day of mental torment. William imagined this way why he had never married, because he disliked - no, hated - Ivy and deprecated women in general. His misogyny was only partly his mother's fault. His sister could certainly take her share of the blame. As far as he could remember back in his childhood, Ivy had been a thorn in William's side.

He wallowed in the steamy heat of the bath, trying to deluge these idle thoughts and pass on to more reasonable and less ugly memories.

A distinctly loud knock at the door downstairs interrupted William's reverie. Such an invasion of a favourite pastime as bathing himself would not be tolerated. He would go downstairs in a temper, yes, and...well, despite his stilted character with people he was determined not to be polite and condescending. Putting on his bathrobe, he reached the front door just as further, insistent hammerings assaulted his ears.

"Yes!", William said curtly as he yanked open the door and he was immediately muted by the scowling face of his sister, who strode into the house. Ivy was her usual thoughtless self, complete down to the cigarette hanging from the corner of her mouth. William's heart sank as he trotted sheepishly behind her, his bathrobe flapping. He felt in that instant that he would like to crush her in his fat, red hands.

"Your welcome," Ivy said, brushing William's attempted apology aside, "was certainly not in an altogether friendly spirit, William." She spoke from the corner of her mouth in a garbled fashion, a feat only performed by the most practiced of chain-smokers. "I mean," Ivy continued, "I am your only visiting relative after all!"

"Well I was -"

William was cut off in mid-sentence with, "Where's the ashtray?" Ivy removed the cigarette from her lips, not without difficulty since it clung to her lipstick with a kind of symbiotic persistence. The precariously balanced inch of ash toppled to the carpet. William cringed - he had vacuumed only that morning.

He looked at Ivy with almost ill concealed hatred and how that emotion welled up inside him. She sat there, with her face caked with makeup, splashed with rouge, eyes heavily etched with mascara, hair reeking of laquer and her mouth! Those horrible yellow teeth and painted red lips. In contrast to all this, Ivy's figure was well proportioned for her age and she would often flaunt herself in front of William with ridiculously low-cut dresses, deliberately playing on his inexperience with women. It would not have been as bad if it had been someone else, but for your sister to taunt in such a way, well William thought it obscene and Ivy somehow not quite human.

William asked himself pitifully why she did this to him, why she



insisted on seeing him. Why she played on his small failings, which wouldn't ordinarily matter. Ivy was completely without feeling for William's idiosyncracies and all he could do was seethe quietly within himself. He never showed his rancour openly, that would make her behave even more nastily.

The difference between brother and sister was a much a case of chalk from cheese as anything could be. William with his fresh, boyish features, unmarked with the ravages of time, well fed, contrasted markedly with Ivy's worn, but painted face and her terrible liquid cough, induced by years of cigarette smoking.

As if to annoy William further, guessing his thoughts, Ivy produced a series of sibilant and liquid coughs in succession. Finishing her symphony of retched sounds, Ivy said, "Well, William? I did ask for an ashtray. You look like you're in a dream!"

"No, sorry. I was just thinking..." William mumbled. "Here you are... Ivy." He almost choked on the name as he handed her a small dish. It was hard to say when so much antipathy welled up inside him. How true her name was, he thought, exactly like Ivy, creeping, clinging, strangling, sucking out the life...

William was well aware of why she came to visit him. Ivy and her filthy alcoholic husband were after his money. That was the beginning and end of it. Ivy visited him in the hope that he would lend her some of his inheritance. The family fortune, not a small sum, had been shared equally between Ivy and William on the death of their mother. William mentally scowled, thinking about the way Ivy's share had been abused. She had squandered it on trash, on a husband whose alcoholism was confirmed by Ivy's lack of financial restraint and now she was fawning on William like some prodigal.

"Well, I'll be staying the whole weekend, William," Ivy continued. "Jack's had to go out of town on business." Jack was her husband and as William well knew and he was more likely to be on one of his frequent alcoholic sprees than away on business.

"Oh, that's... nice... Ivy." William strained the words, trying to say them with some degree of normality, but it was difficult. Inwardly he contemplated an agonising and frustrating weekend, another of many he had had in the past. As he thought about it, William realised that Ivy's visits were becoming more and more frequent, which probably meant that Jack was sinking lower and lower into his drugged state and was more unbearable to live with.

Aside from the disagreeable aspects of Ivy, William knew that he had to go through a battle, a verbal battle in which Ivy would be constantly talking about their joint inheritance and why William should part with his half since he still possessed most of what their mother had left them. But no, he thought, she would be the very last to have his money. He would kill her first. The thought blossomed in his mind, but his generally passive nature asserted itself and he regretted the diabolic idea. He mumbled something about putting on some clothes and

left the room with its claustrophobic atmosphere.

As soon as he returned, minutes later, the war of nerves began.

"You know, William, you're looking very pale. You should get more fresh air, go out, enjoy yourself instead of reading stuffy old books all the time!" Ivy's voice grated on William. "Like me and Jack. When mother - dear soul - left me the money, Jack and I thought about saving it, but where's the point? I mean, you can't enjoy it when you're gone, can you?"

"No, I suppose not," William muttered in answer - he had heard it all before.

"I mean, Jack and me have been all over. Italy, Spain, France. We've been places and done things, William, we've seen a bit of life." Ivy paused, lost in the memory of foreign places. William, as usual, felt he had to oppose this view, but he was not a good conversationalist and could only think up the best replies in arguments when the argument was long over.

"Well, Ivy, there might be something in all this travelling, but it's nice to have a nest-egg to fall back on. Something sound behind you. Besides, it doesn't suit me to travel. I'd much prefer to read."

"Oh, William!" Ivy disapproved. "What can you get from those stupid books? You can only think of places, but we've seen and felt. You can't stay here like a hermit for the rest of your life..."

"But you don't understand," whined William, "everybody can't be the same, individuals have widely differing tastes. I would much prefer to -" William was cut off.

"Now I know as well as anyone that we've been a bit rash, Jack and me, but we've enjoyed ourselves and you could too." Ivy paused letting that sink in and William realised that as usual she was plotting something. "Why given the chance, we would be really happy to show you places you'd marvel at. I know we've spent our share of the money, but we wouldn't go half as wild as we did if we took you along. And you could look after all the cash, just give us a small allowance. I mean, I am your sister and all..."

So it went on until the evening television started. Then Ivy ceased her wheedling for the sake of the frightful programmes. William began to wish he had never bought the television set. He only ever watched a few of the more intellectual and documentary programmes, which were few and far between as far as he was concerned, but Ivy watched literally everything, expecting William to provide tea at regular intervals, not to mention dinner. William went about these tasks meekly, as he always did, but he went to bed early, leaving his sister transfixed.

.....

In bed William could not sleep. He began to ponder on his evil desire to be permanently rid of Ivy. His hate for her had been

a lifelong thing, but it had never come so far as to think about delivering her up to whichever unearthly hosts might want her soul. Or perhaps it had, subconsciously. Hell was almost too good a place for her, William thought, but perfectly sure that Hell would be the damnation due to her if he did kill her. The thoughts of murder came more readily to him now, but he had to think of the consequences.

Jack, his brother-in-law, would be on to him and subsequently the police when he found out that Ivy had not returned home. The police would be crawling all over his house, looking at his things, asking hundreds of questions. William horrified himself with the thought and at the same time suddenly realised that the police would inevitably question him if Ivy disappeared, but could prove nothing if no one knew she was visiting him this weekend. Jack, in his alcoholic stupor, wouldn't know Ivy had visited him. It was a standard thing when Jack was paralytic with booze for Ivy to go away and she never told him where. William had found out, quite shockingly, when Ivy married Jack, that his alcoholism often led him to violence. He had seen Ivy more than once bruised about her face. So, since Jack would almost certainly remain intoxicated for days and would not know where Ivy was, it should be easy enough to dispose of her without anybody ever knowing she had been visiting him.

As William lay there, it seemed he had at last resigned himself to murder. It was a necessity for his future peace of mind and happiness. However, the deed should not be messy, William hated mess of any sort. Now what to use... William thought of all the kinds of murders he had read about and ended up with smothering. There would be no ghoulish screams for the neighbours to hear, no blood stains, nothing. It could also be affected this night, he contemplated. Another few hours to make sure she was in bed and fast asleep, and then...

William slept fitfully for a while, strange dreams of fear and hate tugging him back to wakefulness. Later he slipped out of bed, putting on his robe. He returned to his bed and took the pillow. It flopped to his side in the darkened room like a weird, corpulent miniature of himself.

The hallway, a tunnel of night, saw two forms of darker shadow edging warily along. A window at the far end of the hallway became etched in moonlight as passing clouds romped on through the sky and William's plump face showed bleakly grey, spotted with sweat. His mind was in a turmoil as he plodded silently along. He imagined Ivy waiting for him, fully awake, knowing his bestial plan. Sitting there on the bed, waiting, smiling gleefully through thick red lips...

Dismissing as best he could these scalding thoughts, he stood erect outside the spare bedroom. William confidently knew that the door would not creak when he opened it, because he oiled all the doors regularly. Grasping the cold metal of the door knob, he gently pushed back the door and stepped into the room, his bare feet padding the soft pile of the carpet. He could see the

whole room by the moonlight that flickered outside where clouds and a tree tried to dim its radiance. He moved forward.

On the floor he could discern Ivy's underclothes, her brassiere strewn like a piece of silver seaweed. Her other clothes lay about in disorder while the gaping black hole of the open wardrobe remained empty. He knew she would be too lazy to use coat-hangers. William stepped gingerly over her panties and up to the bed.

Ivy lay obscenely, the covers rumpled below her firm breasts. William looked at them, tore his gaze away quickly, then looked again, his breathing becoming rapid and heavy. He was overcome with a sudden, hot flush of urgency and leapt on to the bed, smashing the pillow on to Ivy's upturned face.

She began struggling frantically, the bedclothes slipping away, revealing her fully naked body. William was petrified by the nude form, erotically struggling beside him. A smell of sweat arose to his nostrils and Ivy's hands pawed his body through his nightgown. He felt an implacable feeling welling up inside him, like a hideous locked-up monster which could not escape its prison, but this turned readily into red hatred and William crushed the pillow harder and harder on to his sister's face. Finally, quietly, with a muffled sob she became still. Her clawing hands slid almost voluptuously down his inner thigh and he stepped away, lifting the pillow from her face. On it was a livid smear of red - not blood, but Ivy's carmine lipstick. A merciful cloud billowed over the moon that instant to hide the deed and William ran from the room in fear and shock.

William sat mesmerised for hours afterwards, his fat body hung over a chair. His senses were a chaos of horror as though his head had been encased in cotton wool in which all the most horrible insects and spiders crawled. An hour before dawn a fluttering thought amid the endless terrors of the night urged him into motion. He realised that he would have to dispose of Ivy's body. Almost without thinking he set about this task, its necessity and inevitability if he were to escape judgement.

He wrapped his sister's corpse in some old hessian which he had found in the cellar. He clothed the body tightly and tied it with rope, bent double, head to toe. The thought of the stiffening flesh in the house almost made William retch, so he dragged it into the garden. An old dustbin provided a convenient container for the time being. Since Ivy's body was bent double, it fitted neatly into the unused bin. It was not far off from November fifth and on such a day a large bonfire would arouse no suspicions.

Two days later William imagined he could smell something foul emanating from the bin. A strange putrid odour which made him veer away whenever he went into the garden to build the bonfire or tend the plants. Roll on Guy Fawkes Night, William thought, trying to give himself confidence. It was only by thinking about the final annihilation of the corpse that William could remain sane. A good blaze, dig in the ashes. No more smell and no more

sister. No evidence...nothing!

The stench became increasingly worse and it surprised William that decomposition should proceed at such a fantastic rate. Old Mrs Grange next door came round, complaining about 'that awful smell you have here Mr.Dillington', to which he replied rather nervously that he was trying out some new compost on the garden and that the smell would disperse soon. Although his neighbour could smell the sickly odour, William himself was sickened by its pervasiveness. His closeness to it played on his mind and he became like a man hypnotised. The murder also plagued him, tainted his every thought so that only the burning of the body could alleviate his guilt. At least that is what he hoped. By the time Guy Fawkes Night came though, William had become like a zombie. He put the last few logs on the bonfire in a kind of trance, placing them mechanically, neatly, hardly aware of what he was doing.

The dustbin was absolutley loathsome to go near, but he would have to, despite the detestable, fetid smell which poured from it. He tried to pull himself together, but his feelings had been almost battered into insensibility by the shock of realisation of what he had done. All there was in the world now was a stench out of Hell, billowing into his mind, burning him up. Only one horror could be worse - the sight of the corpse. He had forgotten that it was well wrapped up.

The day wore on and the sun settled itself to bed. William had passed the last few hours sitting silently in a chair, staring into the garden, watching the slow process of twilight turn into absolute darkness. It was like the darkness in his soul. Darkness would also conceal his ghastly work until the bright flames purged away the horror. He opened the kitchen door and went into the garden. Lifting the lid of the dustbin, he neered inside.

Even in his present state of shock, he was startled by the yellow, phosphorescent growths which fostered on the hessian wrapping the corpse. The mould oozed slime in its horridness and it disgusted him absolutely. He had often thought of Ivy, when alive, as a person slowly rotting away with cosmetics and the phlegmy tar of cigarettes and as he gazed now into the putrid bin, this thought welled into his mind again. He quickly moved away, gagging on the smell and took a container of paraffin, poring its contents on to the dry timber of the bonfire. William could hear children shouting excitedly in distant gardens and saw the first fireworks shoot skyward. He knew that soon many garden fires would be blazing away and the general noise and tumult would conceal his own grim work. He looked again at the meticulously built bonfire.

His pyre was ready.

Quickly a match was struck and by the dancing flames, William's face appeared death-like, his eyes eerily glazed. He began to tip the bin over and the misshapen lump wrapped in hessian fell out with a dull, wet thud. As it did, the material split open and

William gazed, paralysed with fear where he stood.

Ivy's corpse was nothing like it should have been, for there on the garden path lay a putrescent yellow mass of swollen skin and mould. Out of it protruded a semblance of Ivy's face, with staring eyes and bloated red lips. William covered his eyes to blot out the awful sight of it, but the thing moved and he was forced to look upon a horror that swiftly cracked his mind.

The thing - what should have been merely a corpse - moved, rolled on its puffy, bloated conglomeration of corruption, the face set in it quivering with life! It moved like a slime-trailing snail towards William, intent by its expression on smothering him in folds of slimy mould!

William's last grip on sanity was shattered and he screamed one piercing screech, turned and ran - headlong onto the roaring flames of the bonfire. Within a few minutes he was totally consumed.

.....

The police were called in the following morning by William's helpful neighbour, Mrs Grange, who had heard a terrible scream in the night and was afraid to go out, especially since it was Guy Fawkes and there would be fireworks flying about. The police found, in the dying embers of the fire, the charred remains of William Dillington.

However, they did not seem to notice a filthy, mould covered piece of hessian and a pool of thick, yellow liquid on the garden path. If they had seen it, they took little notice, but either way, it quickly evaporated in the autumn sunlight.

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the mythos writers;

colin wilson

Art: Dave Carson.

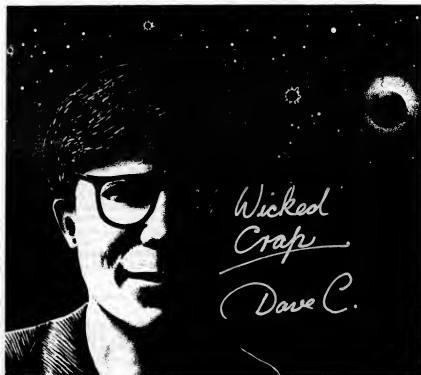
MACABRE: Perhaps we could begin by asking you how to came to be interested in the Mythos? And what prompted you to write your Mythos stories?

WILSON: I explained in the introduction to the Arkham House edition of MIND PARASITES how it came to be written. I explain there - and have explained elsewhere - that my first feeling about Lovecraft is that he's an interesting case history rather than a genuine creative writer. The interesting thing about him is that he fought so hard against enormous odds. Basically the provincialism and parochialism of Providence. But he seems to me to be a man whose major motivation was what Maslow calls 'deficiency needs'. Which is to say that if a starving person had a really creative bent, and had the guts to write in spite of starvation, he would probably write stories all about enormous meals. A sex starved romantic writes stories in which beautiful girls feature very largely. And so on. Of course, there is always an element of deficiency needs in all creation, but if it becomes too large, then somehow it tends to invalidate the writing. I think that Frederick Rolfe's HADRIAN THE SEVENTH is an interesting example of a borderline case - pure wishful thinking, which doesn't quite make it into genuine creativity lifts you completely off the ground, so that you really become unaware of the author's pathetic humanity. And with Lovecraft, I never cease to be aware of this. Apart from anything else, he doesn't really have a very good sense of words, so that he's always overdoing it and piling on the adjectives. You'll find these criticisms expanded in my introduction to our book THE NECRONOMICON, which, you will have gathered, is basically a spoof.

MACABRE: You seem to be suggesting that you find Lovecraft an unsympathetic character. Why then did you find him interesting enough to use his work as a basis for some of your own?

WILSON: What fascinates me about Lovecraft - as about Poe - is that feeling of 'there but for the grace of God go I'. During my childhood and teens, I lived in a working-class environment, and was underprivileged educationally. (I left school at sixteen). But luckily, I was a fairly cheerful, healthy sort of child, and was greatly spoilt by my grand-parents, which I suppose gave me a certain feeling of invulnerability. So although, like most creative writers, I went through this nightmare period in my teens - Chesterton says that he literally 'descended into

hell' during his teens - I never really gave way to it, or let myself get too gloomy and self-pitying - as I suspect Lovecraft and Poe did. Besides, I was naturally clever and had quite a good sense of words - I was always top of the class in English language and literature. So although THE OUTSIDER is also a kind of disguised gesture of rebellion - I once told T.S.Eliot that it was my own equivalent of THE WASTE LAND - it isn't anything like as gloomy as Lovecraft. Moreover, I



could feel - as anyone who has read the book will see - that I was within sight of certain solutions, and that if the problems were faced without self-pity and with a certain determination, there was no need to feel that we are ultimately defeated by the world. Lovecraft's horror Mythos is based upon a feeling that the world is so disgusting that he wants to turn his back on it, and to create a more interesting and frightening world. I have always seen a close connection between Lovecraft and Stanley G. Weinbaum and it is significant that Weinbaum began as a writer of romantic women's stories in pulp magazines.

MACABRE: So far this seems fairly critical!

WILSON: Now I'm not denying any merit to Lovecraft's Mythos. On the contrary, I think that he builds up a great deal of really imaginative power. But there is a basic problem with his stories - they all have basically the same form. The narrator tells you that he has just come out of an experience that has left his hair white, and from which he will never recover. Then he goes on to tell you the story - set in the haunted house with rats in the walls or whatever - and it always ends with some horrifying - or would-be horrifying - catastrophe. But the trouble is that the catastrophes are never really horrifying. In fact, when he thinks he is being most horrifying in THE SHADOW OUT OF TIME, he is actually writing very good and fascinating science fiction with no element of horror in it at all. In other words, he is emerging out of his deficiency needs and becoming genuinely creative. In short, I think the horror is a kind of shadow of his deficiency needs. A friend of mine remarked the other day about David Lindsay - the author of A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS - that he only had one single story to tell, and he told it over and over again in his six novels. I'm inclined to feel that much the same is true of Lovecraft. Obviously, what I wanted to do when I decided to write THE MIND PARASITES - which came out of a germ of an idea thrown off in a book called INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EXISTENTIALISM - was to try to show some of the potentialities of the medium that I felt Lovecraft had missed. Both the real psychological horror and imaginative science fiction. I must also admit that I have always enjoyed that element of 'fake erudition' in Lovecraft, and I thought I could also probably outdo him in this. So I suppose there was a kind of feeling of rivalry.

MACABRE: Do you think you have exhausted your own contribution to the Mythos? Will you return to it?

WILSON: As far as I am concerned, I don't think I shall return to the Mythos again - for the reason I have just stated. It tends to be extremely limited. All that can actually happen is that the 'ancient old ones' (has anyone ever noticed that 'ancient old' is a tautology?) begin to reveal their presence with various spooky happenings, and then erupt with a bang - driving everybody mad. This is really the basic plot of all three of my Lovecraft books, and towards the end of THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE, I found myself labouring rather heavily to sustain it. So I don't see myself having another go at it.

MACABRE: Why then did you return to THE RETURN OF THE LLOIGOR and revise it for separate publication?

WILSON: I don't think I did revise THE RETURN OF THE LLOIGOR. When I reread it, I saw that it required another paragraph somewhere to explain something which I'd carelessly overlooked in the original version, so I stuck it in for the Village Bookshop edition.

MACABRE: Do you know the work of the other two major English writers of Mythos stories, Ramsey Campbell and Brian Lumley?

WILSON: No, I've never heard of any other English writers in the Mythos.

MACABRE: Lastly, can you tell us anything about the filming of THE SPACE VAMPIRES?

WILSON: As to this film of THE SPACE VAMPIRES, I'm afraid it is a slightly sore point at the moment ((Note: interview conducted in November 1979)). One evening a couple of months ago, Dino de Laurentiis rang me up and asked me if SPACE VAMPIRES was still free, as Michael Winner wanted to make it. They offered me \$150,000 for it. I said they would have to wait until Monday morning because I knew that my agent was negotiating with some little film Company who were offering a mere \$3,000. You can imagine my rage on Monday morning when my agent told me the deal with Cannon Films was tied up. Especially as a friend in Hollywood tells me that they are basically a small outfit who make cheap horror movies, and that Klaus Kinski - who has now acquired a great reputation - was known in earlier days for playing in similar cheap horror movies. Obviously, I'm crossing my fingers that they make a good movie, and that it might lead other producers to start making other books of mine into films, but am not really too hopeful. Of course, the whole damned deal may well fall through as most of my movies - no all of them - have so far! Sorry I can't go on any longer but have to settle down to this book on astronomy.

MACABRE: Thank you very much.

Note - Colin Wilson's account of his discovery of Lovecraft in the Arkham House edition of THE MIND PARASITES makes a most interesting story and worth seeking out that edition. In summary the story is this: whilst staying at the house of an old friend in Corfe Castle during 1959, he picked up as bedtime reading a copy of the Arkham OUTSIDER. Intrigued (his own first book in 1956 had the same title) he read it and shortly after wrote THE STRENGTH TO DREAM, which discusses Lovecraft amongst others. Later, in 1961, he lectured at Brown University, and investigated both Lovecraft's Providence and his letters in the library. Writing to Arkham House to enquire which books were still available, he corresponded with August Derleth, altered the section on Lovecraft in the US edition of THE STRENGTH TO DREAM and, challenged by Derleth to write a fantasy novel, he later saw a way to write an existential fantasy novel - one about 'monsters inside the mind'.

WRITINGS IN THE MYTHOS: THE MIND PARASITES, 1967; "The Return of the Lloigor" in TALES OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS, 1969; THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE, 1969; THE RETURN OF THE LLOIGOR, rev.ed., 1974; An Introduction to THE NECRONOMICON, 1978.

a gent. of providence

DAVE REEDER

Art: Dave Carson

This room at least is warm. Outside the cold is potent, strong, yet here I can think. I must think - I must try to make sense of all of this.

How strange that it should fall to me to be the one to understand. Yet, perhaps, not so strange - for where else in this world of madmen is one who has the sense to fit together the pieces. So here I sit, in my little room, battened against the cold, surrounded by the few relics of a once-glorious past and of a barely-adequate future, setting down hints and allusions for the popular press.

Yet the cold grows. Every day it seems worse - is this my punishment for daring to speak or, rather, some fearful presage of the end that is to come? I do not know.

What is clear is that I, son of Virginia and above all else a Gentleman, am the world's only hope. Of course they mock - this modern world of psychologists and sociologists and the rest - hah! - who talk and analyse and know nothing. Nothing. What can they know of me: rightfully a gentleman born out of my time, imbued with talents and dreams of which the mongrel dross has no inkling. I should be riding across my estates, secure in my appointed place, or writing fine poetry with every line chiselled from the rock of pure culture and civility or sitting over the fire at night conversing with the greatest savants of my age, knowing ourselves to be the hope of civilisation.

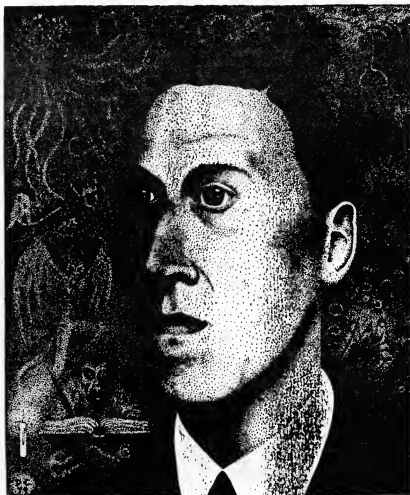
Yet here I am, huddled from the cold like some dread lizard-man, subjected to the odious censure of the world, cursed with half-mad relatives and every day, oh Lord, every day the raucous mobs tear down one more part of our past - the past that nourishes and tends me, that gives me strength and comfort.

The rim is broken, the centre can hold no more - the popular poets whose 'talents' lie in an antipathy to rhyme and meter, the architects who with each new stone monstrosity dull our hopes and spirits, the politicians with their sordid dreams of equality. Hah! When was equality ever the progenitor of greatness? Was Rome equal? Or Athens? Did Sigurd and his flaxen-haired warriors bow to the altar of this false god? No, it is only the weak, the feeble, the others who drag us down. Yet I can fool them all - they do not know that I am strong, a raver with the red-hot blood of Norse racing within me. No, they but see a feeble man, old before his time, living a life of dust and pain. I can wait.

For I know. Oh, they think my poor tales (hardly fitting work for one so noble) are a product of my imagination, but one of my

fancies. Their scientists cannot see - their eyes are blind. Let them ponder, let them attempt to pierce the veil that my blood and my brain have penetrated. If they cannot see, they do not deserve to live - none of them.

Yet the cold hinders me - I hesitate to say frighten as this would be a failing for one of my position. I see them coming through the frigid wind. The wings, the tentacles, the obscene parodies of our worst nightmares waiting, waiting for us to be weak enough so they can overcome us. The red blood, the hot fire of courage defeats them - they fear it - but it fades in us and they grow strong. What can I do? My proper haunts are those of antiquity, the calm ordered life of one born to idle-



ness and great things. I am not meant for the sordid, deadening world of commerce - I am an artist. Yet, with my talents comes a supreme responsibility to my position.

My heart and soul cry out in utter despair at the prostitution of my talent - my poor facility for tales of eldritch horror. For who would listen if I were to speak the truth? Who would dare believe? No, let them laugh and snigger, let them all decry my tales as the fevered rantings of a madman, senile before his time and without the wit to survive in such a crass world of materialism. I can afford to wait - indeed I cannot afford anything else. Their time has yet to come - the gates are still closed to them, the ways not yet clear.

I have time, I can wait. For my knowledge of their loathsome presence acts like a catalyst to keep them back. My 'circle' of friends will spread the word, unknowingly. In time, perhaps, men shall believe. In time, perhaps, when they are meant to.

Yet the time grows ever shorter - the years fade and melt away and still our defences are unsure. But I can do no more. Had I not the civility of my rank I might venture into the marketplace and shout for all to hear - once, indeed, I went to our Capital meaning to try some such attempt. The weight, the mass of loathsome humanity dulled my purpose - my energy spent in mere survival. For I am weak - it pains to admit it - my body is that of a sick child and all my Aryan blood and iron sinews are not enough to overcome the stupor that this age overwhelms me in.

At night, in the cold fastness of the black hours, my resistance is as nothing. My heart beats within me like a damaged bird and, at times, I almost feel the ebony wings brush my face, smell the sordid odour of the pits, taste the ichor that bleeds from pestilence and fevered death. They are near at such times yet, always, my power is too great.

Who would believe any of this? Great men in their time are all derided and so, like a wise hermit, I seal myself away from the world and pray that the hints and allusions I place within my work will take hold, will grow till our blood, red-hot in our veins, boils and fumes and gains the strength to push back the night, to survive.

The hour approaches when I must face the cold, must venture from the warmth of my chair into the chill world that waits and lurks outside my door. My stocks of food run low and I am weak from hunger. Would that I could feed my spirit too, yet I know this is not possible. I must walk the icy streets, my skin writhing on my bones like some diseased snake, my mind tortured and split by the ugliness of the age, my ears taunted by the evil cries of those whose very ignorance provides the breeding ground for those from beyond. Yet, I know that as I walk the cold earth I shall see behind them, lurking almost out of sight, those giant wings, those blood-red claws that wait for a sign to rend and tear, the fearsome mouths twisted and deformed like

leprosy smiling with evil intent and everywhere, oh God everywhere, the foetid stench of the pits and of the space between the darkness will twist and writhe about me, threatening to drag me down to a world of noxious pestilence.

And they will laugh at me - the men in bars drinking away their meagre lives, the women in fine clothes attempting to hide the sordidness of their lives and thoughts and the children like demonic carrion feasting on their own innocent yet scabrous plague - they will all laugh and point me out. The madman. The half-dead scribbler.

And I, epistler and poet of some more favoured time, Gentleman of Providence and Amateur, will laugh too. For I alone know the secret, I alone have seen the vulpine eyes between the spaces, heard the leathery beat of wings and worse than wings when the night-winds fall, and smelt the blackness from beyond. I alone. And in that solitude I laugh, for all of you are mad. All are blind.

I know the appointed times and the places where the pact shall be broken. I know the positions and orders of their dread hordes. I know the secret names that cannot be revealed or spoken. I know.

And so I curse you and laugh at you - poor, blind fools who shall never understand. I could speak but dare not and so I live a life of cold and dust - warmed by my knowledge.

Tell me, little people - how are you warmed?

your eds..



DAVE CARSON's work has appeared in the BFS BULLETIN, DARK HORIZONS, FANTASY MEDIA and FANTASY TALES, as well as publishing his own LOVECRAFT poster.

DICK FAWCETT is the founder of the August Derleth Society and has edited all issues of the NEWSLETTER. DAVE REEDER has written for BATMANIA, ELDRITCH TALES, FANTASY MEDIA, FANTASY TALES and MATRIX and has edited and written for FORECAST, MATRIX (another one), WORLD OF VISUAL EFFECTS PROGRAMME, BFS BULLETIN and FANTASYCON V PROGRAMME.

They work respectively in a novelty shop, the US public school system and one of London's dockland libraries.

They share much the same ambitions - to be published by Arkham House and to possess a complete run of WEIRD TALES. Some day...

the horror in the cave

jeffrey goodin

Art: Dave Reeder

The jeep stalled at the junction where the road plunged down into Foxrun Hollow. Professor Collins pushed back his battered field helmet and let fly a string of most unscholarly obscenities.

"This thing is more trouble than a mule and a lot less trustworthy."

I climbed out to take a look under the hood, knocking the dust from my clothes. The leaves hung limp on the few scrawny sassafras trees along the roadside. Goldenrod filled my nostrils, and a few crickets with rusty throats were tuning up for the evening. Full Professors of Anthropology are to be respected, I reminded myself, but they don't always travel well.

"Well, David, can you fix her?"

I propped the hood open. Nothing obviously wrong, radiator okay, no smoke, no loose connections or oil leaks. I gave everything a twist for luck and slammed the hood.

"Nothing wrong that I can see. Think I'll just have another go at starting her."

But something caught my eye as I was climbing back in, a flash of white up on the red clay hillside.

"Hey Professor, what do you make of that?"

He shaded his eyes, looked hard against the sun. It seemed odd to him too. Up at the top of the rise, peeping through a stand of young sassafras, was something much like a cross, but with both crossbars bent at right angles downward, somewhat like the Thunderbird of the Western Indian tribes. But this singular cross was topped by a crescent, or a pair of horns. A most unusual tombstone for a country grave, if indeed there were a grave at the top of the rise.

We climbed the red clay hill, dust filling the loafers I'd been stupid enough to substitute for boots. The strange cross stood near the edge of the rise, overlooking the road, and the ground around it had been cleared of weeds and rocks. I soon realised why: there were little piles of food, berries, some coarse bread, fresh corn, even a few flowers, strewn around its base.

I was on the point of stating the obvious, that it looked just like an offering of some sort, when a look from the Professor stopped me. He sat back on his heels, scratched his big red nose and gave me that side-of-the-eyes look that always means he thinks he's onto something.



"This is your doing, isn't it?"

It took me a few seconds to realize what he was hinting. He thought I'd set the whole thing up, maybe even the jeep breakdown, as a kind of elaborate prank. It was the sort of thing I had a reputation for in the department. But I was really as surprised as he, and told him so.

We examined the workmanship of the cross. It had been shaped with fairly good instruments, of white pine, had been sitting there for quite some time, to judge by the weathering. There seemed nothing else to say, so we slid back down the hill.

Suddenly the sun felt very good on my face. I might even have wished that it were a little higher in the sky, for the feelings that that little hilltop aroused were just a bit disturbing.

The Professor stood by the jeep, running a hand through his thick white mane: "If that's an altar, and it's a damned strange place to find one in, we might be onto a genuine folk survival of sorts. We're an hour out of any sort of town, and I've seen no more than two houses since we got off of the main road. This is certainly the kind of isolated area where such a survival could occur."

He paused a minute, continued: "That cross reminds me of an Indian symbol, a kind of mandala to the sun god of the Wyandots - no, not to the sun god, but to his Dark Brother, more of a lunar deity, He Who Walks Behind. If it were a perfect mandala, I'd swear it was Indian..." He gave me a significant glance. "But since I'm in my right mind I won't. Let's see if that damned vehicle will start again."

The jeep started immediately. As shadows lengthened across the road, we headed down into the valley.

Professor Collins had heard, through one of his colleagues in American History, that a diary had just turned up by one Walt Henninger, one of the earliest explorers of the region. Henninger had encountered a tribe of Indians quite different from the Shawnee that once covered most of the triangle between the Mississippi and lower Ohio rivers. Although he spoke several Indian dialects, he had been forced to communicate by sign language.

The part of the diary which especially interested Collins was where Henninger had noted that these Indians were skilled mound builders, who went so far as to dig saplings and transplant them to their mounds in order to hide the resting places of their loved ones.

Needless to say, the Professor and I were delighted to get a copy of Henninger's diary. The accounts of these Midwestern mound-builders were full of intriguing details about everyday life in the village, although Henninger seemed to have been obsessed with some strange gods that the Indians worshipped, gods which they said came down from the sky at certain times of the year.

By carefully going over the geographical references and comparing them to topographical maps, we were able to determine that

the area which had so engrossed Henninger was within a day's drive of the University. Since there are many rugged ravines and valleys, which are as often as not flooded, the area had never been heavily settled.

Our thoughts ran in much the same channels: had the woods remained undisturbed? Were they accessible? Was there a chance of University sponsorship for a small expedition? The arrangements were made with surprisingly little difficulty. In a month's time, on one of those last hot days of September, we set off in the jeep with a tent, a few basic tools, and enough fresh food and water for a week.

There was a special reason why I was so enthusiastic about this trip. I had helped at some highly organized digs in Southwest Arizona, but had found nothing out of the ordinary - nothing that could compare with what the early expeditions had turned up. Here was a chance to do some original work - and, just possibly, to make a name for myself.

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The rough gravel road sloped steeply downward. There were a few black specs on the horizon that might have been crows or buzzards. The woods began a quarter mile ahead and reached on over the next hill, across the valley where the sun was settling slowly, like the bead on a sight.

"Shall we camp up here in the open, or take our chances in the lowlands?" I asked.

He shifted his bulk in the hard metal seat and thought a minute.

"Go ahead, there may be a stream down there, and we could use a little cleaning up."

For just a second I hesitated. I was thinking of the pine cross. There was something about it that struck me as unnatural, the hybridization of symbols through a bastard mating. It made me nervous to think that there were people nearby who tended such a thing.

"That cross..."

"We can ask the first people that we see about it. It might belong to some religious group. A sect of Screemers or the like, may live down there."

The idea was little more reassuring.

Soon we were bouncing through a young wood of sassafras and sumach that whipped dusty leaves against the windshield. The road bent around to go straight down into the valley.

Neither of us spoke. We both concentrated on finding a suitable campsite before the valley darkness overtook us. The ground levelled out a bit as we reached the valley proper. I thought I caught the smell of woodsmoke, but it might have been imagination.

The road made a sharp bend into a thicket of pine. As we headed

in this new direction, which I judged to be roughly southeast, the Professor grabbed my arm:

"Look, there through the trees, a stream. Let's clear a space and camp there."

"It looks kind of low to me," I said, "and the mosquitos will be really fierce."

"We've travelled far enough today, time for a rest."

I pulled off the road as much as I could, although I doubted if there would be much traffic. We went to check out the stream before off-loading, the Professor carrying a machete, a relic of South American expeditions.

It was a nice spot, with a breeze coming in from the roadway and a thick roof of branches for shelter. The Professor lopped away at a few lower limbs as I began to clear off a place for our fire. It might get a little cool, and the smoke would keep mosquitos away.

The stream ran fairly clear through here, and I was just kneeling to dip out a cup when there came a voice from the woods behind me:

"Better not drink that water."

I turned and saw the Professor a few yards behind me and to the left, examining an aching foot. It wasn't he who had spoken. I finally distinguished a figure who had evidently followed us in from the road.

The man was tall and lean, dressed as we were in flannel and work pants, and he stood with his hands on his hips as if he owned the place. For all I knew, he did.

"Pour out that water, Sonny. Even the cows don't drink it, it's sure pizen."

I automatically turned back to look at the stream. The low voice continued:

"Yep, it'll grow crops, an' that's about it."

"Well, thanks a lot, mister..." spoke the Professor, extending his hand.

"Bourral. I live just down the road a piece. Heard your jeep and thought I'd see what's the matter. You fellas lost?"

"No sir," I thought it time I spoke. "You see, Mister Bourral, we're from the University. We came to see if we could find some traces of Indians, maybe even mounds, down in this valley."

"Ain't no Indians round here."

"Not for a long time. Nobody would know about these. We just discovered a book by a man named Henninger, who met some Indians somewhere near here."

"A long time ago, huh?" Bourral rubbed a big hand over his balding head. "Well, those Indians are gone, and they didn't leave nothin' behind. If I were you I'd come and stay with me tonight."

These pines ain't healthy."

As if to underline his words, a low southing wind riffled the pines, a wind with an oddly menacing undertone.

The Professor stood with a grin. I could see that he enjoyed Bourral. Although not as tall, he was as broad as the stranger, and, dressed as he was, they seemed two of a kind.

"Aren't healthy? Why, what do you mean, Mister Bourral?"

"Well, the water's pizen, and there ain't no animals round here. Folks say you can be sick just stayin' in the crick water too long. It comes out a big cave, a cave don't even have bats in it."

I began to feel uneasy. There was a certain shiftiness about Bourral, a kind of looking-over-the-shoulder air. Maybe he was hiding something. He might be a moonshiner, for all we knew. I felt like taking his advice.

"You know, Professor, it might be better if we did stay with Mister Bourral for the night."

"Hell no, David, we'll be fine here," and he turned back to our visitor.

"Mister Bourral, could we come and see you tomorrow? I'd like to just pick up a few facts about his valley."

Bourral looked dubious, but all he said was: "Sure, I ain't goin' noplase. But remember I warned you not to stay here."

When Bourral had gone I turned to the Professor: "That guy looked like a rough customer. Do you think maybe he has a still up in that cave?"

"Wouldn't be surprised. But I do wonder about the cave... If there were any Indians around here they would have naturally put it to use. We might even find a clue to those mounds Henninger wrote about."

"Okay, okay..."

There were times when the Professor's knowledge seemed to be more than balanced by his naivete. I didn't push it, however, and we settled down to a meal of canned meat and beer, which I had left in the stream to cool. "After all," I told the Professor, "the water can't get in the cans."

Sitting around the smokey fire and drinking our beer, we speculated about the cave. Henninger hadn't mentioned any cave, but it might have been something that the Indians kept hidden from outsiders. Yet they couldn't very well hide the sound of all that water. But the water was 'pizen' and of no use to them... It wasn't long before our talk tired us and we let the day's exhaustion take hold. I put another wet log on the fire and we rolled up in our sleeping bags. A big day tomorrow...

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Something is after the food. This was my first thought as I sat up in the night and reached for my flashlight. I forgot that

Bourral had declared the woods to be free of animals when I heard that sound.

Something was moving in the woods. There were no snapping twigs, growls or rustles, and this made it all the odder that I could hear its steps. I glanced over to where the Professor lay, snoring softly. It seemed a shame to wake him.

Compromising, I held my light ready, took a dry stick from near the fire and threw it in the direction of the sound. There came a frightening "Thunk!" as if by pure chance I had hit something big, and not a tree. I flipped the light on, jumped out of the sleeping bag. The Professor jerked awake.

"There's something out there stalking around the fire."

"You're dreaming. Go back to sleep, we've got a big day ahead of us."

At the practical, commonplace response I suddenly felt very foolish. That was probably just a fox after the food, and the stick I'd thrown had hit a mossy tree. I tried to go back to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. It seemed that I lay awake all night, listening to those steps, moving big and soft around the fire. With the first crack of dawn they stopped, and I fell asleep.

.....

"David, David, get up!"

It was the Professor, shaking me and holding out his hand with something in the palm. I closed my eyes and rubbed them, looked again. He was holding a small cross of sorts, carved from a light wood that looked like ash. It had curious crosspieces, even a tiny crescent at the top. I gave a mental jerk and recognised the cross on the hillside, in miniature.

"It's the same!"

"Definitely. I found it by the fire. And there are more, scattered all around where we slept."

"Mister Bourral up to some tricks?"

"Has to be."

We ate a light breakfast and headed back to the jeep. It was time to pay Mister Bourral a visit and see if he could throw some light on these crosses. He might also give us directions to the cave. But we had a small surprise waiting for us: the jeep wouldn't start.

I opened the hood. The Professor came up and stood beside me. "What's the trouble?"

I was too mad to say anything for a minute. Just who did he think he was, this Bourral character?

"Professor, the carburetor and a few other things are gone. We're not going anywhere."

He was as mad as I, and then and there we set out to find Bourral.

We hiked up the wooded road for a couple of hours, until the sun was too high for comfort, but there was no sign of a house, another road, or even a path leading off of this one.

As we sat in the shade of the dusty sassafrass and pine, the full import of the theft seemed to hit us both at once. We were stranded in the middle of nowhere with some nut who scattered crosses and held active superstitions about these woods, not to mention being an auto saboteur.

"Professor, let's go back to the jeep and get the topographic maps."

"Good idea! If there are any houses nearby they'll be marked. The survey for those maps was done just three years ago."

It was early afternoon by the time we got back to the jeep. At least the maps hadn't been stolen. We spread them out on the hood.

The road we had followed was a brown dotted line in the middle of woods. There were no houses at all marked on this end of the road, and only a small cluster at the far side of the valley.

It seemed to me that we had three choices: we could strike out for the houses on the other side, for what little help we might get there; we could travel the equal distance back to a hard-surface road and hope to flag down some passing motorist; or, more logically, we could pack up some food and explore the area a bit before trying to find our way out of it. It seemed a shame to have made such a trip for nothing.

"Professor, let's take some food and follow up that stream. If we could at least get a good look at this cave our time won't have been entirely wasted."

"Good for you, David!" The big man patted me on the shoulder. "You're doing my thinking for me. We'll go have a look-see. Only..." Here he looked a little doubtful, "I do wish we had a gun..."

"That machete of yours would scare away most anything. I don't really believe we're in any big trouble. That crazy farmer was just trying to play a bad joke on us. When we get back he'll probably have returned the parts."

"Okay, let's go!"

.....

We followed the stream as far as it ran along the road, duplicating part of our first hike that day. When it curved away into the trees, we entered the woods, crossed the knee-deep water, and continued on the far side, along the right bank.

It was funny, probably suggestion, but the cold water from that stream was really enervating. By the time I'd crossed it I felt ready to call it a day. But I couldn't let an old man like the Professor get the best of me.

The first part of the hike was a real struggle. It seemed as

if the trees themselves were rejecting our presence in the wood. Low vines clustered about our ankles and tripped us. Tree limbs, some with long thorns, wild pear, maybe, lashed our faces and left stinging cuts. I could only be grateful for the odd absence of insects.

In fact, we saw no signs of life as we headed deeper into the dark wood. Suddenly the Professor gave a gasp and collapsed on a fallen tree trunk.

"Hate to admit it, David, but I'm just about winded."

"Shouldn't be too far to the cave now, Professor."

Gradually I became aware of a sound that had been in the back of my mind for perhaps half-an-hour. It was a dull "Whooshing" much like the wind in the trees. The spring! We had to be very close.

"Let's go, young man," cried the Professor with a touch of his old vigor, "we haven't got all afternoon."

The ground became increasingly steep, and our feet sank into the rich humus of the forest floor. Strange fungi, bloated shapes of an almost human flesh colour, clung to the hillside around us. I didn't recognize these, but they had a definitely poisonous cast about them.

We were heading up at an angle that I supposed to be roughly eastern in direction. We must have been well above the valley floor by then. A washed cliff to be negotiated, a little side valley, and we found ourselves before the cave.

Here was a large spring indeed! The pathway of its fall was covered with great moss-encrusted chunks of limestone. Beyond, the watercourse led back to a dark opening in the hillside, veiled with trailing streamers of vines and moss. If there had only been a bird, a butterfly to enliven the scene, it would have been truly beautiful.

But there was something. Over the entrance to the cave, carved from the living stone, was the same type of cross we had seen at the entrance to the valley, the same type of cross that had been scattered around our campfire. That strange uneasiness took me again, a sense of something ancient and decadent in that symbol. I was ready to leave the cave and its mysteries then and there, and I only wish now that I had followed my impulse.

The Professor, however, was thrilled.

"David," he said, sensing my mood, "we know a lot about enduring folk-motifs in various cultures. The idea's been developed and ridden into the ground, but what we have here may be one of those rare true instances. Perhaps the original settlers got the symbol from the Indians and passed it down. After all, the use of jimson weed - *Datura* - to poison British troops in Jamestown during the Revolution was learned from the Indians. In any event, we cannot afford not to explore that cave."

"You'll think I'm crazy, Professor, but it could well be dangerous."

"We won't take any chances, David. Let's just see how far we get."

At least there were no bats. In this, Bourral had been right. Our lights flashed back from wet seeping walls. The floor of the cave was strangely smooth and clean, and the possibility of recent visitors did nothing to reassure me.

There seemed to be one central passage, and we followed it without even having to duck our heads. There were few stalactites or stalagmites, just those too-smooth walls.

The water flowed out in courses on either side of the passage, which, domed to a slippery ridge in the middle. It was eerie to be surrounded on all sides by moisture that was said to be poisonous, as if the very evaporation, or condensation on our clothes could be dangerous.

The Professor stooped to examine the floor of the cave. In the beam of my flashlight, his face showed elation.

"David, these channels are man-made!"

Somehow, I found it hard to share his enthusiasm.

We had been going for perhaps half-an-hour when we came upon the most curious item of all. In the centre of the pathway, facing back into the cave, was another cross; but this one was fully four feet tall, with a three foot crossbar, apparently carved from what was once a mass of stalactites and stalagmites. On the side facing into the cave our lights picked up symbols in a broken script.

"Professor, no Indians made that writing."

"No, it doesn't seem to be..."

He turned to me, eyes alight: "Do you suppose... Do you suppose that this could be... Pre-Indian?"

The idea was staggering. It was assumed by some scholars that Scandinavian or Phoenician adventurers had penetrated to the interior of the American continent. Could this be one of their legacies?

"There's one thing that bothers me," I said, "why should the writing face backwards into the cave?"

"Perhaps," laughed the Professor, "it was meant to keep something in."

We continued to work our way back through the tunnel, pausing in a few large rooms with stalactites to look for side tunnels, but finding none. This in itself was strange, for the action of water in a limestone cave will usually carve out numerous channels. But the strangest thing of all was yet to come.

We had just rounded a bend in the tunnel when the Professor stopped and flashed his light to the floor of the cave. I came up beside him to see what he'd found.

At our feet lay the body of a man in cave gear, but the cool

cave air had kept the body from decaying. I turned it with my foot, as the Professor shook the dead man's lantern to see if there was any oil left in it.

He looked down just as I did, and then without a word, we began to work our way back toward the entrance of the cave.

I had never seen anything like that before, not even in Korea, and I still see it sometimes in dreams that leave me in sweat-soaked exhaustion. The body wasn't well-preserved, it was fresh, and death had come horribly indeed. The man's face seemed to have been flayed, which just might have been the work of a hungry animal, but his ragged shirt was open, and in the centre of his chest was a deep bloody hole, shaped exactly like the crosses we'd encountered in that accursed valley.

The implications were clear. Not so very long ago a man had been killed, or at least mutilated after death, in an inescapably ritual manner, and we had no guarantee that those responsible were not still lurking in the area. Our lights shook as we began to run, and I saw that the Professor had his long machete in his hand.

We ran down that long, long tunnel, our flashlights throwing weird reflections from the smooth shiny walls. Suddenly I heard the Professor fall, behind me, since I had gotten a little ahead of him. At the same moment, I heard the voices.

I stood still and listened. There were people coming through the tunnel, from what direction I couldn't tell. The weird soft voices seemed to come from the very walls.

I immediately turned back, and swept my light around where I thought the Professor had fallen. Then I heard sounds of a struggle, further back in the cave, and a short scream that quickly brought total silence. In some strange rush of courage, or madness, I ran back.

The place where the Professor had fallen proved to be deeper in the cave than I had thought. My light showed scuffed marks on the cave floor, then an object, or rather two objects, that froze my feet to the spot.

By the light of my flashlight I saw the Professor's machete, the blade covered with blood. I saw this, and a pale sickly thing that for a moment I didn't recognize. Then the shape became familiar, and terrifying. It was a deformed human arm, ending in long, clawed fingers, severed at the shoulder.

Then I heard the voices again, behind me, toward the entrance to the cave, and in total screaming panic I ran ahead into the darkness, my flashlight forgotten beside the gruesome relics. I tried to look behind me, and fell. In a rush of pain, I lost consciousness.

At this point in my story I must hesitate, but whether from the fear of not being believed, or of being believed, you must decide. I was unconscious for a long time, and I awoke in total darkness with no idea which way was my path out of the cave.

My head ached terribly, and, oddly enough, I was conscious of great thirst. After a while I perceived that there was a light off to the left, very faint, but clearly a light.

I got to my feet and felt around for the flashlight which, of course, I'd left behind. Shakily I began to make my way toward the light, which I supposed to be the entrance of the cave.

This light was bluish, and as I neared it, and it became a diffuse glow, I realized that it could not be any kind of daylight. This light danced, as if from flames, and once again I heard those damnably soft voices.

The narrow passage took a bend, and around this the light, and the voices, seemed to originate. Cautiously, still dazed from the blow on my head, I flattened myself against the damp walls and edged around the corner.

They were very much like men, and the few differences made their horror even more terrible. They seemed to be totally blind, and as they wore clothing that revealed much of their skin, I saw that they were perfectly white, from being so long beneath the earth. It was only when one of them opened his mouth to speak that I saw the long, pointed white teeth.

They were gathered around one of those crosses, even taller than the one near the foot of the cave. The cross itself was the source of the light, the cross and a curiously carved basin at its base. It took no imagination to guess the purpose of that basin, which seemed to be wreathed in living flame.

I think I was actually on the point of going forward, with some vague idea of rescuing the Professor, when they brought him in. At the sight of what they had done to him I screamed, and kept screaming.

Then I was running back down the dark passage, blundering against the walls, picking up cuts and bruises at every fall. Their voices rose excitedly behind me, an inhuman gibberish that gave me an extra burst of speed.

Suddenly I tripped over something and fell full length. I had fallen over the body of the cave explorer. The voices were closer now, and in the midst of my panic I had a sudden lucid moment. The caver's lantern! I reached in my pocket and found matches, felt around for the lantern. It still had oil in it.

I found the tap on its base and let the oil out over the floor of the cave. Their voices, their horrible soft steps, were almost on me, and I knew that I couldn't outrun them now if I tried. I struck match after match, but they were too damp. In desperation I struck several together at once. There was a tiny flame, which immediately fell from my shaking hands into the pool of oil.

It flared up just as they reached me, a lurid flash that showed me every detail of their snakey human bodies, the pale sightless faces that now registered a terror as great as my own. I staggered back from the flames and by their temporary light made for the entrance. I remember vividly the cool cistern smell of the

rocks at the mouth of the cave, the soft breeze and early evening light, and then I must have collapsed across the rocks.

A country sheriff was helping me to my feet, with Bourral just behind him. Bourral was saying something about "eating poison plants" and "crazy city people", and the sheriff was nodding and shaking his head. I grabbed his shirt and tried to get him to go and find the Professor, to kill the things in the cave that had gotten him, but with each word his face grew more and more pitying. The two of them half-carried me out of the woods.

.....

The events of that trip, as well as my month in the sanitarium, are far behind me now. Of Professor Collins, there was no trace, and he is presumed to have come to a bad end somewhere in that accursed cave. I teach undergraduates Anthropology, and publish scholarly papers, and my drinking seems to be common knowledge, benevolently tolerated by the faculty of my small college. But someday I will tell you what my researches into forgotten books told me about the origins of a certainly strangely formed cross, and why I have never been able to drink up the nerve to further explore the mysteries of that accursed valley.

in a more jugular vein..

Welcome to the first issue of FANTASY MACABRE - we hope that you have enjoyed it enough to want to subscribe to the second issue. Just send the cover price now to reserve your copy (post free!).

Already on hand for the next couple of issues are these stories: "In the Bayou" by Ed Lesko, "Soulhunter" by Simon R. Green, "The Lampshade" by Jim Anderson, "Death's Bright Angel" by Mike Chinn, "Testing the Spirits" and "Moonforms" by Stephen Gresham, "The Living Head" by Phillip C. Heath and "Cae Coch" by Dave Reeder. Already commissioned are art portfolios from Allen Koszowski, Dave Carson and Emmanuel together with a complete David Keller bibliography by Mike Ashley and further instalments in "The Mythos Writers".

Orders (and submissions with SAE's) should be sent to: Dave Reeder, 32a Lambourne Road, Chigwell Row, Essex, U.K., or to Dick Fawcett, 61 Teecomwas Drive, Uncasville, CT 06382, U.S.A.

We welcome your comments and ideas for possible features. Lastly, would artists please note that all artwork is commissioned directly, although we are always interested in seeing samples.

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"But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity".

Andrew Marvell
"To his coy mistress"

**steve
jones**

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